

position was more serious than he had imagined, and he could see no justification for himself in forcing her to continue in it. On the other hand, what she had told him had been fuel to the fire of his curiosity concerning the pendant. Besides, he reminded himself, if it were the Rumanian cross, the fate of several people hung in the balance. He must not think of her alone.

"Why not tell the truth? Tell him he can have it to-morrow."

"He wouldn't let me leave town until he had it. And I must go to-night!"

"Then let me tell him for you."

"No, no; he doesn't know you have it."

"Doesn't he know you came here?"

"No. But he knows that I'm going to Chicago. I'm to meet him at the station and give him the pendant. And if I haven't got it he won't let me go, and I shall lose my engagement. You must help me!"

Gavock sprang up. "Wait. I have an idea."

He hurried off, and in a few minutes was back with several railroad time-tables in his hand. "There are two trains for Chicago to-night," he said as he sat down. "Which station do you leave from?"

"Pennsylvania, at ten-fifteen."

"Good! There's one at ten from the Grand Central. Now this is my plan: It is now half-past eight. I have just thought of a way by which I may be able to get the pendant for you to-night, before you go—"

"Oh, if you only could!" she broke in. "Wait. It's only a chance, don't bank too much on it," he cautioned. "You will have to wait here for me. I shall return in time to take you to the train, whether I bring the pendant or not. If I do bring it, your troubles will be over, won't they?"

"Yes—oh, yes!"

"If I don't, this is my plan: I shall take you to the Grand Central and get you a ticket for Chicago on the ten o'clock train. Then I'll hurry over to the Pennsylvania station and tell your manager that—well, that some friends are taking you over the other road—in their private car. That will satisfy him, and by the time you reach Chicago to-morrow the pendant will have been returned to—the owner. How does that strike you?"

"I can't think of anything better," she admitted. "But you don't intend to give him the pendant, do you? You'll just send it back without a word or anything to let him know where it comes from?"

"Certainly, if you prefer that. But you must give me the name and address."

She hesitated a moment. "I'll give them to you later—if you don't bring it back. If you do, you wouldn't have to know, you see, and—I'd rather you didn't."

"Very well; as you like," Gavock agreed. "Now you can't wait here. I will arrange for a room for you, and you will have a good hour's rest."

"Rest!" she exclaimed.

"You'll be alone and quiet, at least. And you can depend upon me. I shall return in time to take you to the station."

A few minutes later he saw the elevator start that was to bear her to her room. Then he hurried out, hailed a taxicab and gave the chauffeur Amarinth's address.

On the whole he was well pleased with the solution he had found for Miss Lowther's plight. He would get in touch with Szemere at once. If the cross was not the one the Rumanian was looking for, he would simply turn it over to the girl and be done with the matter. If it was the one Szemere was seeking—well, she would have to travel to Chicago by the New York Central.

CHAPTER XVII

THREE quarters of an hour later Gavock was closing the interview he had sought with Count Szemere. It had taken place in Hugh Senior's library, in the presence of Hugh and Amarinth. Before showing him the pendant Gavock had exacted from Szemere the story of the one missing from the necklace, and the Rumanian's description had been so exact, that no doubt as to the identification was possible.

The cross lay on the table about which the four men were seated. Gavock was speaking.

"I understand then, Count Szemere, that with the recovery of the necklace and the pendant all interest in the affairs of Miss Dupont on the part of you or your government will instantly cease?"

"Perfectly. Prince Lascar is dead. To know how or why he died will not make him to live again." He turned to Hugh. "I regret, Mr. Senior, if my great need has this afternoon made me lack indulgence for you and your ward. My whole future is depending upon this cross, and I feared then that through you I should lose it. Regarding my knowledge of the former career of Miss Dupont," here his glance shifted slightly to include Amarinth, "I assure you that you may rely with the most perfect confidence on my discretion."

"Thank you," Guy said.

Hugh silently inclined his head.

"To-morrow," Szemere continued. "I shall take measures to establish the claims of Prince Xico to the necklace and the cross. I shall communicate with you as soon as I am prepared to do so."

"I trust you quite understand my position in this affair," Gavock remarked. "The person through whom the cross came into my hands does not claim to own it, and is ignorant of its history. There is, however, a person who does claim ownership, and what the attitude of this person will be I am not in a position to say. I confess that I find myself awkwardly placed. I shall have to proceed with caution. Since the cross is the property of Prince Xico, it will be restored to him. In the meantime, of course, it remains in my possession."

"But certainly," said Szemere. "It is most valuable, however, and I implore you to have great care of it."

Gavock had picked up the cross.

"The Metropolitan Bank, near your hotel, keeps its safe deposit department open all night for the benefit of women who want to turn their jewels in after wearing them, if you want to have the thing out of your hands," Hugh suggested.

"That's an excellent idea," Gavock replied. "I shall take the cross there at once." He put it in his pocket and carefully buttoned his coat over it. "Good night, Mr. Senior. Good night, Guy. I hope the end of your troubles is near."

"I can never thank you, sir!" Guy stammered.

"You owe me no thanks, my dear boy. The whole thing has come about by accident. Well, good night."

His cab waited at the curb, and behind it stood Szemere's. The two men parted with a brief word of farewell, and were presently being borne to their respective destinations. Amarinth had remained behind.

AT his hotel Gavock found Miss Lowther anxiously awaiting him. He was a trifle later than the hour he had set for his return, having stopped to deposit the cross at the bank; but in the face of her disappointment at his arrival without it he was glad that so little time was given her to bewail the fact. He felt enough like a brute as it was.

"You must give me that name and address now," he reminded her.

She was silent for a while, and when she did reply it was with evident reluctance. "The name is Dr. Louis Aubert," she said, "and the address is 80 East 54th Street. But you mustn't go to him!"

"I'll just jot that down," said Gavock. "Will you spell it, please? Ah, yes, thank you—a French name."

"Yes, he is French."

"Come now, we must hurry," he urged.

She caught her train to Chicago, and as it pulled out of the station Gavock fervently hoped he had seen the last of her. In accordance with his promise he then dashed down to the Pennsylvania Station, hurried to the gate for the Chicago train, and inquired for the manager of the theatrical company that was aboard.

A fat man standing by the gatekeeper answered: "I'm him. What do you want?"

"A member of your company, Miss Lowther—" Gavock began.

"Lowther!" The manager grabbed his

arm. "Do you know anything about her?"

Gavock opened his lips to reply; but at that moment he felt some one brush up from behind him, and turning he met the black eyes of the stranger with the Vandike beard whom he had encountered that afternoon at the hotel. So that was Dr. Aubert! Then caution was in order. "I should like to say good-by to her. Is she on the train?" he substituted for the words he had meant to speak.

With a grunt of disappointment the manager dropped the arm he had seized. "No. She ought to be; but she ain't. I've got nervous prostration standing here waiting for her. No more society dames for mine! Never again!"

Dr. Aubert, who had doubtless heard it all before, walked off.

"One minute more!" warned the gate-man, and Gavock seized the chance to deliver Miss Lowther's message.

"Why in blazes didn't you say so before?" demanded the theatrical man.

"Too many listening," Gavock said, with a glance toward Aubert, who had turned and was again approaching.

"Oh—I see!"

"What does he see, I wonder?" thought Gavock as the gate clanged in his face.

On his way to the cabstand he passed quite close to Aubert, and the Frenchman leveled at him a malevolent glare.

"Now just how am I going to deal with that gentleman to-morrow?" Gavock considered. "No wonder the girl was in a blue funk. He looks like the devil himself."

With a sigh of relief he sank on a taxicab seat. The day had been strenuous. He was glad he was going home to sleep. To-morrow would bring its own troubles. As soon as the question of the cross had been settled he would make an effort to find Andrus and through him determine Miss Dupont's identity. But without Andrus' permission he would not drag him into the case. He had promised not to speak of having seen him, and he must keep his word.

CHAPTER XVIII

WITH the departure of Gavock and Count Szemere from Hugh Senior's house an awkward silence fell on the two men left together in the library. The same thought was in the mind of each; but both found it difficult to utter. The disappearance of the girl had not been mentioned during the interview just closed; not so much from any intention to conceal it from Gavock, as because Szemere, the cross within his reach, had not broached the subject. His one goal in sight, his interest in Marie Dupont had ceased. He no longer needed her.

Finally Guy broke the pause: "Has she come back?"

"No."

"It's nearly ten o'clock. It's been five hours!"

"Yes."

"What can we do?"

"Nothing."

Hugh Senior walked over to the fireplace. "Sit down, won't you?" he said. "I want to talk with you."

He stood looking down into the fire, and the spurts of flame that rose from the logs revealed the deepened shadows in his clean-cut face. There was a brief silence before he turned and for a moment let his eyes dwell on his companion's troubled countenance. Then he spoke.

"I don't know where she went nor why; but I know she will come back. When she does—what then?"

Amarinth's eyes shifted, he stirred in his chair; but he said nothing.

"It will be up to you, you know. With Szemere eliminated, the question becomes a personal one between you and her. You are married; but in the circumstances it will not be difficult for you to regain your freedom, if that is what you want."

"You mean an annulment?"

"You've thought of it, then?"

"Well, can you blame me?"

A log, burnt through, fell from the irons, sending out a spray of red sparks. Amarinth shoved his chair back slightly to avoid

them, while Hugh caught up the tongs and replaced the fallen ends upon the irons. The noise of their own movements prevented the two men from hearing the step that at that moment sounded in the hall.

Marie Dupont appeared in the doorway. She paused, staring at the backs of the men as though waiting for them to turn. Her figure drooped wearily, and her eyes, dark-rimmed and half closed, gave to her face an expression of utter exhaustion.

"I don't see how you can blame me," Guy declared when his companion dropped back into his seat. "No man would want—such a woman for his wife!"

"Then you feel quite satisfied that Marie is this Alix Floria?"

"How can I doubt it? God knows I would if I could! But what doubt is there?"

"There is the girl herself," Hugh answered quietly. "As I know her and as you know her, she is all a man could wish a woman to be, isn't she?"

"Yes; but lots of women have deceived men that way. How can you know what she was or was not before you knew her?"

"But such an idea is monstrous, Amarinth! I don't care what appearances may seem to prove—it isn't the first time they've lied. Stop, man, and think—think what you would accuse her of! You don't realize it, that's evident. This Floria was notorious. The theater she appeared in was notorious. She drew her audience, not by her dancing, but by her love affairs. And you are willing to believe that Marie was ever that woman? By Heaven! the idea would be laughable if it were not so monstrous!"

Amarinth was silent. The girl in the door stood as if made of stone.

"It isn't possible—it isn't possible!" Hugh went on. "No woman could so completely change her nature."

"Oh, what's the good of theorizing?" Guy exclaimed with a tinge of irritation in his voice. "The facts are there! You can't get away from them—at least, I can't. Gavock recognized her; so did Szemere. There's the exact agreement in dates, there's the necklace and the coat she wore. And there's her dancing—don't forget that! Besides, where is she now? Why did she go away if it wasn't to avoid Szemere?"

"Perhaps to avoid you."

"Me?"

"You came here, her husband, and you didn't speak to her, nor touch her hand, nor even look at her except with suspicion. I know—I watched you. What must she have thought or felt?"

"I did look at her, and she wouldn't meet my eyes. She was afraid. She knew she had deceived me. She had no right to marry me knowing what she did about herself."

"Knowing! I tell you she knew nothing but what I knew; not so much, in fact. Her mind is a blank as far as her past life is concerned. Suppose she was this dancer once, she doesn't remember it. She doesn't remember one thing,—nothing she did or said or thought before the moment when she woke up in my aunt's house seven years ago. Whatever her life may have been, her consciousness is as free from it as if it had never been. If there was ever in her mind the memory of any shameful thing, the loss of memory left her mind clean of it."

"Did it leave her body clean?"

HUGH started to his feet with a cry of anger and indignation. "Amarinth, you're a—" He bit back the word on his tongue and curbed his fury. "Don't you love her at all?" he asked after a moment.

"No!" Guy retorted sharply. "I may be whatever you were going to call me; but I can't love a woman I don't respect."

Their hostile eyes hung together. In the stillness the clock on the mantel ticked loudly. The girl had not moved.

"It's going to be hard for her," Hugh said at last. "She loves you. Try to remember that."

Amarinth's frown deepened; but he made no answer.

"She loves you," Hugh repeated. "What—"